

SDMETRO

your business your life

NO. 3 VOL. 41



Steve Mattia



Benjamin Schenk



Hilary Ego



Ulrich
Matsunaga

40 Under 40



Dr. Alexandra
Kharazi



Allyson Werner



Alexander Miller



Jake Ragan



Devon Arabo

SERVING SAN DIEGO, LOS ANGELES AND IRVINE

619-777-7700

RJS LAW
A TAX LAW FIRM

www.RJSlawfirm.com

Our mission is to always provide quality journalism for our readers by being fair, accurate and ethical and a credible resource for our advertisers.



SAN DIEGO'S 40 UNDER 40

40 Under 40 is San Diego's premier event honoring outstanding young leaders. **PAGE 4**



Challenging Traditional Healthcare Models

California uniquely permits private insurance for comprehensive healthcare in Mexico. MediExcel Health Plan offers affordable care at its Tijuana hospital, delivering 40-80% savings versus U.S. costs while serving 17,000+ border commuters and employers.. **PAGE 9**



California will soon have more than 300 Data centers. Where will they get their water?

Imperial, California, faces controversy over a proposed \$10 billion, 330-megawatt data center that would use 750,000 gallons of water daily. Residents worry about rising utility costs and strain on local supplies amid the state's data center boom and drought concerns. **PAGE 10**



California Lettuce Growers Regulatory Compliance 1,400% Higher Per Acre Since 2006 When CA Climate Change Bill was Passed

A 2025 Cal Poly study found California lettuce growers now spend 12.6% of production costs on regulatory compliance—up from 1.26% in 2006. Costs per acre surged 1,366% to \$1,600, driven by labor, food safety, air quality, and water rules. **PAGE 14**



YEREVAN

A couple explores Armenia, discovering Yerevan's vibrant culture, ancient monasteries, hiking trails, and resilient spirit. From world-class cuisine and wine renaissance to stories of survival, the trip reveals a nation rich in history, hospitality, and quiet strength. **PAGE 18**



The 'payer' in 'single-payer' health care is government — and you

Leading California Democratic gubernatorial candidates Tom Steyer, Katie Porter, and Xavier Becerra back single-payer healthcare, which would replace private insurance with a government-run system costing ~\$392 billion annually—exceeding the state budget and requiring broad new taxes. **PAGE 26**

Chairman | CEO

Robert Page
BobPage@sandiegometro.com

Publisher

Rebeca Page
RebecaPage@sandiegometro.com

Associate Editor

Douglas R. Page
dpage@sandiegometro.com

Art Director

Christopher Baker
cbaker@sandiegometro.com

Photography/Illustration

Benjamin Myers
Jim Childers

Contributing Writers

Martin Krumming
Michael McHugh
Marsha Sutton
Alexi Koseff
David Rottenberg
Myrna Marston
Marlise Kast-Myers
Andrew Simmerman

Advertising

SALES & MARKETING DIRECTOR
Rebeca Page

Get in the loop with SD Metro's Daily Business Report. Sign up for daily emails on the latest business at sandiegometro.com

P.O. BOX 3679
RANCHO SANTA FE, CA 92067

SD METRO magazine is published by REP Publishing, Inc. The entire contents of SD METRO is copyrighted, 2026, by REP Publishing, Inc. Reproduction in whole or in part is prohibited without prior written consent. All rights reserved. All editorial and advertising inquiries can be made by calling or writing to the above. Editorial and ad deadline is the 24th of the month preceding the month of publication. Mail subscriptions of SD METRO are available for \$50 a year for addresses within the United States. A PDF version of this issue is available at sandiegometro.com. Additional information, including past articles, online-only content and the Daily Business Report can be found at sandiegometro.com. For reprints or plaques of articles published in SD METRO, please call Rebeca Page at 858-461-4484

All real estate advertising in this newspaper is subject to the Fair Housing Act which makes it illegal to advertise "any Preference limitation or discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, handicap, familial status, or national origin, or an intention, to make any preference, limitation or discrimination. "Familial status includes children under the age of 18 living with parents or legal custodians; pregnant women and people securing custody of children under 18. This magazine will not knowingly accept any advertising for real estate which is in violation of this law. Our readers are hereby informed that all dwellings advertised in this magazine are available on an equal opportunity basis. To complain of discrimination call HUD Toll-Free at 1-800-669-9777. Th Toll-free telephone number for the hearing impaired is 1-800-927-9275.

Read us online at:
sandiegometro.com



Richly Deserved.

Royce Williams is finally awarded the Medal of Honor



Williams with Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth (second from left) during the Hall of Heroes induction ceremony at the Pentagon (2026)

Finally! Seventy-four years later, after the most incredible aviation achievement in American naval history, Royce Williams has been awarded the Medal of Honor at President Trump's State of the Union address.

Williams' heroics took place on November 18, 1952. He had lifted off from the deck of the USS Oriskany in his F9F-5 Panther fighter jet. Very soon, he found himself in a dogfight with seven Soviet MiG fighter jets, faster and more nimble than his Panther. The better man, the then-27-year-old Navy lieutenant Williams, won by shooting down four of the MiGs before returning to the Oriskany in his Panther, riddled with 263 holes caused by bullets and 37 mm cannon fire from the Soviet MiGs.

For nearly all of these seventy-four years, the Navy — including President Eisenhower — ordered Williams not to say a word about his dogfight with the Soviet jets, as the U.S. was not at war with Russia in 1952. Once the story was made public, it took a herculean effort on the part of a cadre of Navy veterans working tirelessly to secure the Medal of Honor for Williams. Navy veteran Steve Lewandowski, with an assist from Congressman Darrell Issa, worked his way through government channels on Williams' behalf.

Williams spent 37 years in the Navy. Interestingly, his heroics were first documented in Soviet archives after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. The Russians confirmed that six of the seven MiGs which Williams encountered never returned to base.

Today, Williams is a spry 101-year-old living in Escondido, mentally as alert and active as ever, surrounded by family and friends, and enjoying his nightly shot of Monkey Shoulder blended malt Scotch whisky.

Here, in his own words, is Williams' recollection of his aerial battle with the seven Soviet MiGs:

"It was toward the end of the Korean War, and I was aboard the USS Oriskany in the Sea of Japan when our radar picked up a squadron of enemy Soviet MiG-15 fighter jets heading our way.

A few of the other naval aviators and I hopped in our F9F-5 Panthers to intercept them and protect our aircraft carrier.

When we got above the clouds, I spotted seven contrails, meaning there were seven Soviets we had to take down.

But that's when things took an unexpected turn.

Before engaging, my division leader's emergency warning light came on, and he had to return with his wingman. That left just two of us.

The Soviets noticed we were on their tail and immediately broke off in different directions.

I quickly shot down one, and my wingman veered off to finish the job.

Now, it was just me versus six Soviets.

It felt like the battle raged on for hours, endlessly twisting and turning to try and shake them off my tail.

There was a point where I was never flying straight. If I did so for even a second, I would have been instantly killed.

Every once in a while, I was able to get behind one of the Soviets and fire off a few shots before they were back on my tail.

Then they hit me, and I was going down fast.

Thankfully, I was close to our naval carrier, so I had the luxury of two grim choices: land in the sub-zero waters below and freeze to death, or crash-land on the carrier and hope to God my fighter jet didn't explode on impact.

Somehow, I landed and hopped out of my F9F-5 in one piece. I counted 263 bullet holes in my jet.

To this day, I'm the only American who's ever shot down four Soviet MiGs in one fight.

It's truly a miracle that I survived that day.

It's a miracle that I'm still alive to tell the story when so many of my brothers-in-arms from the Korean War were not so lucky.

I hope that the lessons of duty, honor, and sacrifice I risked my life for will never be forgotten."

2026 40 Under 40

40 Under 40 is San Diego's premier event honoring outstanding young leaders.

Sponsored by SD METRO Magazine, 40 Under 40 began in 1999, making this the 27th consecutive year.

Over this period of time 1,080 of San Diego's most outstanding young people have been honored.



STEVE MATTIA

He is a Chaldean American, born and raised in El Cajon. He is the principal attorney at Mattia & Yousif Law and has been practicing for the past ten years. His primary area of practice is estate planning, where he helps clients secure their future through wills and trusts while protecting their assets and their families. He is a past Grand Knight of the Knights of Columbus Mar Toma Council and remains actively involved in its activities. He also volunteers his time with Chaldean Radio, where he directs educational programs to help the community better understand various laws and answer legal questions related to his area of expertise. He is a volunteer at St. Peter Chaldean Catholic Diocese and has been named a 2025 Top 40 National Trial Attorney as well as a Super Lawyer Rising Star. Married with three children, he is a graduate of San Diego State University and the Thomas Jefferson School of Law.



BENJAMIN SCHENK

He joined forces last year with his father, Frederick Schenk, and his aunt, Lynn Schenk, to launch the Schenk Law Firm, which specializes in personal injury, business, and mass tort law. Broadening its breadth of services, the firm recently expanded into a full-service practice through the strategic merger with Lizerbaum Law APC, increasing its business advisory capabilities while continuing to operate under the Schenk Law Firm name. Benjamin Schenk brings an unusually diverse and accomplished background to the newly expanded practice. After graduating "magna cum laude" from Dartmouth College, he worked as a product manager at Bridgewater Associates, the world's largest hedge fund. He later founded and continues to lead The Civic Group LLC, a San Diego-based commercial real estate investment and asset management firm. Drawing on his rare combination of finance, entrepreneurship, and legal expertise, he serves as a core member of the Schenk firm, focusing on catastrophic personal injury, wrongful death, mass torts, and complex business law. He is a graduate of the University of San Diego School of Law.

HILARY EGO

She has led the implementation of the City of La Mesa's Climate Action Plan as the Environmental Sustainability Manager across energy, transportation, water, waste and recycling, and urban forestry since 2020. She completed major efforts including the 2024 Climate Action Plan Update, Electric Vehicle Charging Station Master Plan, Green Business Program, San Diego Community Power launch, and Urban Forest Management Plan. She is currently advancing the City's first climate adaptation strategy focused on extreme heat with the Extreme Heat Action Plan and Solutions Toolkit. She also supported development of the City's first solar project at municipal facilities and launched programs that expand equitable access to sustainable options, including the E-Bike Incentive Program. She has been recognized as a Climate Science Alliance Leader and has secured and managed grant funding. She is a former NCAA Division I student-athlete as a member of the UNLV Women's Swimming and Diving Team and is a certified indoor cycling instructor. She is the author of a children's book, "How I Saved the Earth".



ULRICH MATSUNAGA

He is an associate with Crosbie Gliner Schiffman Southard & Swanson LLP (CGS3) and a core member of its entity formation and tax practice. His work sits at the intersection of partnership tax, entity design, and commercial real estate execution, a combination that makes him a go-to attorney for the firm's most structurally complex transactions. On any given matter, he may be forming the entity stack for a joint venture, drafting waterfall distribution and promotion provisions in the operating agreement, structuring a tenancy-in-common arrangement for an agency-financed property, often within the same deal. He advises clients on accessing green financing mechanisms. He also serves as a professor of federal estate and gift taxation at the University of San Diego School of Law. He is an active member of NAIOP San Diego, a volunteer and patron of the Oceanside Museum of Art, and a wildlife champion of the San Diego Wildlife Alliance. His leadership, expertise, and commitment to client service have quickly established him as a rising talent at CGS3. He is a graduate of Cornell University and the USD School of Law.



Congratulations to our partner Benjamin Schenk, one of SD Metro's Top "40 under 40"

A rising force in the legal profession, Benjamin has earned recognition for his exceptional work in catastrophic injury, mass torts, and complex business litigation. A trial lawyer and co-founder of The Schenk Law Firm, he has built a reputation for delivering strategic counsel, relentless advocacy, and results that matter. Driven by a deep commitment to justice, he protects his clients' interests with skill and integrity - deftly navigating every stage of the legal process.

The Schenk Law Firm

schenklawfirm.com
858-424-4444

Congratulations to DR. ALEXANDRA KHARAZI One of SD METRO's 40 Under 40

Dr. Alexandra Kharazi is a board-certified cardiothoracic surgeon in San Diego, dedicated to performing advanced heart and lung procedures with both precision and compassion.

With each procedure, Dr. Kharazi is committed to guiding patients and their families through some of life's most difficult moments - combining technical excellence with genuine care to ensure every patient has the best chance at both survival and renewed quality of life.

alexkharazi.com

[linkedin.com/in/alexandra-kharazi-md-facs-892846a6](https://www.linkedin.com/in/alexandra-kharazi-md-facs-892846a6)





DR. ALEXANDRA KHARAZI

She is a board-certified cardiothoracic surgeon dedicated to performing advanced heart and lung procedures with both precision and compassion. Her expertise spans coronary artery bypass grafting, valve repair and replacement, complex aortic surgery, and the use of mechanical circulatory support for patients facing the most critical conditions. She believes that surgery is not only about saving lives in the operating room but also about restoring strength, dignity, and the possibility of a healthier future. With each procedure, she is committed to guiding patients and their families through some of life's most difficult moments, combining technical excellence with genuine care to ensure every patient has the best chance at both survival and renewed quality of life. She is the author of "The Heart of Fear", a collection of stories on adversity, passion, and perseverance. She is a member of the Women in Thoracic Surgery organization and a graduate of UC Davis and the UCSD School of Medicine.



ALLYSON WERNER

She is a litigation associate in Glaser Weil's San Diego office. Her practice focuses on complex commercial litigation. She has experience in business disputes, real estate matters, and construction-related claims. She brings a strategic and detail-oriented approach to her work. Prior to joining Glaser Weil, she served as a judicial law clerk to the Honorable Ruth Bermudez Montenegro of the United States District Court for the Southern District of California. She earned her Juris Doctor degree from Columbia Law School and her B.A. degree in global and international studies at UC Santa Barbara.



ALEXANDER MILLER

He is a senior associate in Glaser Weil's litigation group. He works closely with clients to successfully meet their litigation objectives and efficiently resolve disputes. His practice encompasses all aspects of litigation, including complex commercial, trade secrets, employment, class action, and post-acquisition disputes in state, federal, and arbitral forums. He represented an owner in a high-stakes partnership dispute involving fraud and the embezzlement of millions of dollars from a fashion company. After two years of litigation, including a jury trial, the parties reached a confidential agreement. He is a graduate of UC Santa Barbara and the USD School of Law.



JAKE RAGAN

He is a litigation associate at Glaser Weil whose practice centers on complex commercial litigation. Since joining Glaser Weil, he has served as second chair in multiple jury trials and has taken on significant responsibility throughout all phases of litigation. Prior to joining Glaser Weil, he practiced at a construction law firm. He also represented a real estate developer, a property owners association, and related individuals in complex litigation matters arising from real estate sales, involving allegations of breach of contract, fraud, and related tort claims. He is a graduate of the USD School of Law and Cal State Monterey Bay.



DEVON ARABO

He is Of Counsel and co-chief of operations at RJS Law, where he is a vital member of the firm. He focuses on complex tax controversy matters, representing clients before the IRS, Franchise Tax Board (FTB), Employment Development Department (EDD), and California Department of Tax and Fee Administration. Known for his strong analytical skills and strategic approach, he regularly navigates highly complex tax issues and delivers meaningful financial relief for his clients. He is a mentor at the USD Legal Clinic, helping guide and support aspiring attorneys. He is a "Triple Torero" with three degrees from the University of San Diego (Bachelor of Accounting, Juris Doctor, and a master's in Taxation).

THAJAIRA DALI MUNOZ

CASA CORNELIA

VALERIA VARGAS

CASA CORNELIA

AUGUSTUS HOLM

INDIGO CONCEPTS

BRANDON FORTINO

FORTINO STUDIOS

ANN MARIE PRICE

SCATENA MEDIA GROUP

RYAN POYNTER

RO HEALTH

ANDREW HARVEY

SD COUNTY CA

DAVID CHIPPER

DAVID SCHIPPER

SARA NEVA

PROCOPIO

KATE BALATBAT

WITHAM MAHONEY & ABBOTT

BO PETERSON

ALLEN MATKINS

JAMIE ALTMAM BUGGY

HARVEST, LLP

PARASIMA JASSIM

JASSIM LAW



CGS3
LAW

SAN DIEGO | LOS ANGELES
858.367.7676 | WWW.CGS3.COM

**Congratulations to
Ulrick Matsunaga, one of
SD Metro's "40 Under 40!"**

A rising force in our entity formation and tax practice, Ulrick delivers sound and strategic counsel on complex transactions, helping clients navigate intricate structures while prioritizing practical, ethical, and balanced outcomes. His recognition is a reflection of his many accomplishments to date, and a testament to the leadership and innovation he brings to our firm.

Hilary Ego

San Diego Metro Magazine's 40 Under 40



City of La Mesa is proud to recognize Hilary Ego for her exemplary service, outstanding leadership, and significant contributions to the sustainability and well-being of the La Mesa community.

HEATHER RAMSEY

BIOCOM

NIKKI HOLLOWAY

DCA PLANNING ARCHITECTURE

SASKYA CAICEDO

THE THERAPY GARDEN

JENNIFER SCHOENECK

CITY OF ESCONDIDO

TYLER RENNER

PEOPLE ASSISTING THE HOMELESS

DAVID POTTER

CHELSEA INVESTMENTS

HEATHER DIAMOND

SAN DIEGO COUNTY CREDIT UNION

JEANNA VAZQUEZ

UC SAN DIEGO HEALTH

CHERYL NIEMAN BRECHLIN

HARVEST, LLP

AMELIA BELLA HAHN

NOAH HOMES

LESLIE AQUINDE

UC SAN DIEGO

SARAH BALDWIN

VISTA HILL

MELANIE HAYNES

CUSHMAN WAKEFIELD

STEFFI HAFEN

SNELL & WILMER

MIGUEL NAVA TAPIA

M C T

MATTHEW ROTA

CATALENT

BREE WONG

P C L CONSTRUCTION

TYLER RENNER

PATH

Challenging Traditional Healthcare Models

By Leah Hardwick

The state of healthcare in the U.S. has become one of the defining issues of our time. Rising costs, an aging population, and increasing payment denials put a strain on individuals and the system itself. While research and innovation advance, improvements in access and affordability have not kept pace.

One unique solution has emerged in California. With limited exceptions in Texas, California is the only U.S. state that allows private health insurance companies to sell policies with comprehensive coverage provided in Mexico.

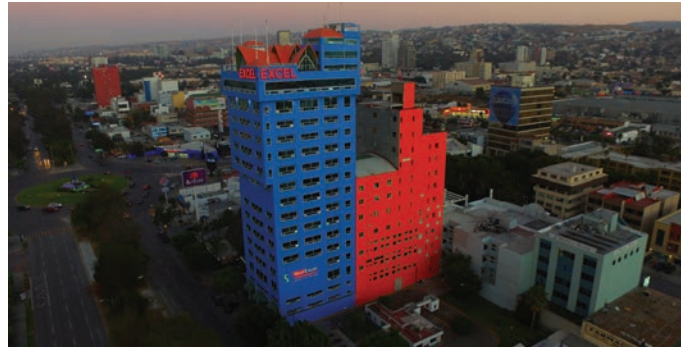
MediExcel Health Plan is a San Diego-based company offering cross-border coverage. Licensed in 2012 by the California Department of Managed Health Care, MediExcel Health Plan provides care at its all-inclusive health care campus in Tijuana and its medical group in Mexicali, with emergency and urgent care covered around the world. The plan is designed to serve the more than 63,000 people who commute the San Diego/Mexico border daily to work in California. The plan offers health, dental and vision plans to employers as a low-cost benefit option alongside their U.S. carrier. Currently, MediExcel Health Plan serves over 17,000 members and more than 1,000 employer groups in San Diego and Imperial Counties, with care delivery in Mexico.

Cardiothoracic surgeon Jose Gaudencio Hernandez-Fujigaki, MD, FACS, FACC, FACP founded MediExcel Health Plan as well as the Excel Medical Center (or Excel Hospital) in Tijuana where members receive care. He was also the Founder and served as chairman of the Cardiovascular Surgery program at Sharp Chula Vista Medical Center from 1981 to 2006. After performing surgeries on both sides of the border for decades, he saw the need for a cross-border system.

Dr. Hernandez-Fujigaki states, “With MediExcel Health Plan, we can provide a medical procedure at a savings of tens or even hundreds of thousands of dollars to a patient, compared to U.S. medical billing.”

Affordability is among the most compelling reasons to obtain healthcare services in Mexico, with significantly lower premiums and out-of-pocket costs. Savings estimates range from 40% - 80% for most medical procedures. Additional reasons include improved accessibility, reduced wait times, language preference, and perceived quality of care. Excel Hospital has state-of-the-art facilities, more than 55 medical specialties, and employs 500 staff members, many of whom are multi-lingual and have U.S. affiliations.

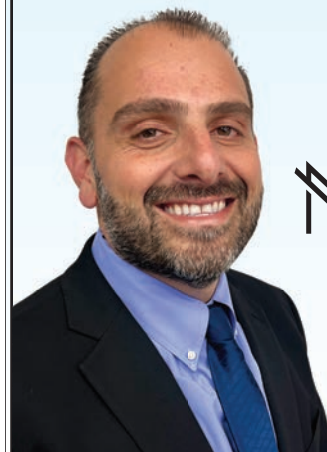
As policymakers and employers search for scalable solutions to address healthcare challenges, California’s cross-border insurance model offers a compelling alternative. The success of MediExcel Health Plan suggests that cross-border care could play an increasingly important role in the broader conversation about healthcare reform in the United States.



JOIN US IN CONGRATULATING
STEVE MATTIA
 ON BEING NAMED ONE OF THE
 2026 40 UNDER 40

PRACTICING LAW FOR OVER 10 YEARS:

ESTATE PLANNING
 PROBATE
 CONSERVATORSHIP
 PERSONAL INJURY
 CORPORATIONS & LLC
 BUSINESS STRATEGY



MATTIA & YOUSIF
 LAW

MATTIAYOUSIF.COM
 (619) 795-6632

CALIFORNIA WILL SOON HAVE MORE THAN 300 DATA CENTERS WHERE WILL THEY GET THEIR WATER?

By Steven Rodas | Inside Climate News

IMPERIAL, Calif.—The new data center proposed for a quiet city about 115 miles east of San Diego came across people’s radars in different ways.

For patrons of the deli on West Aten Road, it was the white “Not In My Backyard” signs jutting out of lawns.

For local irrigation district workers, it was something called an “electric service application.”

For Margie Padilla, it was a rant on Facebook.

The 43-year-old mom came across a post online while she had a few minutes to scan social media last spring after a day spent tending her garden and taking care of her two boys.

“Somebody was complaining about this center,” Padilla said. “I was like, ‘Whoa, what’s going on here?’”

What’s going on is the second-largest new data center being considered statewide, which would be less than half a mile from Padilla’s stucco home in the center of Imperial Valley. If finished by 2028, as the developer expects, the at least 950,000-square-foot, two-story data center could be the largest operating statewide, taking up 17 football fields’ worth of land.

The roughly \$10 billion, 330-megawatt data center would require 750,000 gallons of water a day to operate, said developer Sebastian Rucci, who insists electricity and water costs won’t rise due to the data center.

“We have studies on the air. We have studies on the water. The electricity could be handled,” Rucci said. “We did our homework.”

Imperial officials haven’t quelled local concerns, only noting that the project is facing litigation and that the center’s long-term impacts on utilities haven’t been determined.



On top of the financial burden of maintaining her family's health, gas and grocery expenses strain Padilla's budget and she's worried a new data center will only increase water and power costs. Padilla, who first heard of the data center a year ago, has only grown more concerned and she's not alone.

Some residents would see it from their backyards.

"I can only imagine the rates going up once that data center is up and running," she said, shading her eyes from the beaming sun.

This is one of two dozen data centers expected to open in California in the next few years.

Growing Concern and Regulatory Gaps

A majority of respondents to a nationwide poll by the US Water Alliance's Value of Water campaign share Padilla's worries, with 54 percent extremely or very concerned about the effect data centers will have on water quality, water supply and costs in their area.

In its first question about data centers since the poll began in 2016, two-thirds of voters said it was important for their state to have a plan for the effects of data centers on water in the coming years.

"I suspect that as data centers continue to be part of the broad conversation, then these numbers will probably continue to go up as people are more concerned about the impacts they have on the things that affect them and their communities, like supply, quality and cost," said Scott Berry, the senior advisor on policy and external affairs at the US Water Alliance, from Water Week in Washington D.C. this month.

More than 90 percent of data centers in the U.S. get most of the water they need for cooling from municipal systems, estimated Shaolei Ren, an associate professor of electrical and computer engineering at the University of California, Riverside.

During the hottest summer days, a large 100-megawatt facility can use about 1 million gallons of water for evaporative cooling. That amount is the same as about 10,000 people's daily water use at home, Ren said.

But those centers require "zero water for many days of the year when it's cool outside," he said.

Some data centers are exploring alternatives like treated wastewater or graywater for cooling instead of drinkable water, providing residents and officials with options that could reduce strain on local water supplies.

California doesn't require AI data centers to report water usage, and the state's Water Resources Control Board does not maintain a specific list of water rights held by data centers. Although residents are working to require more transparency about water use from data centers, recent efforts to require the facilities' owners to report how much water they use to the state have faltered.

On top of the data center boom in California, the hundreds of water districts, a deepening Southwestern megadrought and the diminishing of the Colorado River increasingly complicate water issues.

Plans for the steep increase in water demand from California data centers inevitably focus on infrastructure, experts said.

"Water is not purely an environmental issue," Ren noted. "In many places, it is fundamentally an infrastructure challenge."

Across the country, water infrastructure upgrades are estimated to cost between \$10 billion to \$58 billion, Ren's research team found. How many more facilities are built and where will be a big factor in future infrastructure costs.

The amount of electricity a data center uses, to some degree, determines how much heat it produces, and consequently how much cooling it requires and, in turn, how much water it needs.

The Imperial County data center is one of 24 planned for completion across California by 2030, according to the latest information gathered by analysts at Cleanview, a market intelligence platform.

Based on the about 1.7 GW of electricity the proposed data centers would use, with at least two projects for which there aren't energy consumption figures, water infrastructure upgrade costs just for the demands of the centers in the state could run from about \$200 million to \$800 million, Ren said.

"This number assumes that California data centers' water use intensity is the same as the national average," he explained.

There is no central permitting authority for data centers in California, and most are overseen by city and county governments, according to the California Public Utilities Commission. Data Center Map shows 286 of the facilities currently operating in California.

While California's size and tech focus lead some to expect many more data centers here, the cost and availability of power and land, as well as the general tax and regulatory climate, have been hurdles to building them out, according to the Data Center Coalition, which represents big corporations like Amazon, Meta, Google and Microsoft.

Nonetheless, California trails only Virginia and Texas in the number of individual data center locations, but its centers have much lower total new electricity capacity, which may also indicate lower water demand.

A research team at the University of California, Riverside, recently found that data centers could collectively require 697 to 1,451 million gallons per day (MGD) of new water capacity nationally through 2030. New York City's average daily supply is about 1,000 MGD.

Currently, data centers are estimated to use about 39 billion gallons of water nationally each year, Khara Boender, the senior manager for state policy at the Data Center Coalition, said, citing market research from Bluefield.

"I know when we start to talk about billions of gallons of water in a year, that sounds absolutely crazy," Boender said. "Looking at how that falls into context with some of these other large water users, I think that that kind of contextualization could be surprising to folks."



Margie Padilla is worried that a proposed data center near her home in Imperial, Calif., will increase power and water costs for her family. Credit: Steven Rodas/Inside Climate News

Alfalfa irrigation in California's Imperial Valley alone uses more than 800 billion gallons a year, an April essay in *Outside* highlighted. The beverage industry uses 533 billion gallons of water a year and the semiconductor industry uses 59 billion gallons, Boender noted.

But spikes in water needs for data centers can lead to bottlenecks in small community water systems, Ren, at the University of California, Riverside, noted. "Only comparing the annual totals can obscure the real water challenge," he said.

There is no single fix for the pressure data centers are placing on water supplies across the state, which will be different depending on the location and water systems where each facility is built, said Shivaji Deshmukh, the general manager of the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California—the largest supplier of treated water in the U.S. The district serves 19 million people in six California counties.

"Every community—even within our service area—is different in terms of costs, what type of supply they have. Some regions have access to groundwater. Some have access to treated wastewater or recycled water somewhere along the coast," Deshmukh said.

So industries, most of which require water for cooling, will look to satisfy that thirst from different sources, depending on their location.

"Imperial Irrigation District is one where I know they're discussing ... installation of data centers in their area," Deshmukh said.

The Imperial Dilemma

The plot of dirt on West Aton Road betrays nothing of the colossal data center that could one day sit on the land. Owner Sebastian Rucci hopes to have the facility up and running by the summer of 2028, he said.

Rucci, who is also a lawyer, has purchased 235 acres for his data center so far. He says the data center will allow Google to train its Gemini artificial intelligence, although Google denies any involvement "in a data center project in Imperial County."

Before he can begin building on the site, a judge will weigh in on the city of Imperial's lawsuit against the project, which demands that it clear higher environmental hurdles, including the California Environmental Quality Act—which often draws ire from developers who claim it can needlessly stall proposals. The local water district also has to complete its review of the project.

Rucci is determined, though, citing a series of studies conducted by survey and consulting groups, and by the district itself, which manages water and provides power. He posted those reports online to show the data center made sense—in part because water and power could be effectively provided to the data center and the land was permitted for industrial use.

The debate between supporters and opponents of the facility has escalated, with the next court date set for the end of April.

With that date in mind, Padilla, the Imperial mother, set out to work in her garden on a balmy Thursday morning.

Donning a green, short-sleeved shirt and flip-flops, she checked on her squash, poked at her cherry tomatoes and dug in her spade

to move periwinkle to a better spot for watering. And through it all, she wondered what the thirst of the proposed data center would do to her garden. And her monthly water bill.

Her payment for water, sewer and trash services currently ranges from \$90 to \$130 a month—more than double what she paid six years ago.

“I’m also afraid they’re going to put [water] restrictions for us, for the residents,” said Padilla, who estimates her family of four uses about 300 gallons of water a day. “That’s going to be harsh on me, particularly, because of my garden. I grow my own food, my own vegetables.”

Margie Padilla tours her garden on April 16, where she holds a carrot that she thinks hasn’t grown well due to drier temperatures in the Imperial Valley. Credit: Steven Rodas/Inside Climate News

Worries over power and water price surges are misguided, Rucci said. He has been considering power and water needs for the 18 months he has worked on the project, he said, and outlined how it would bring various economic benefits to the region, including about 100 permanent jobs post-construction.

Still, Padilla is thinking about other things. She says her two sons were anemic when they were younger, requiring them to eat fresh produce to supplement the iron their bodies needed. Even after treating the condition, the Imperial mom keeps her sons’ diet filled with veggies and fruits. She needs her garden for that.

The Imperial Irrigation District declined to be interviewed for this story but, in a written statement, noted that it has yet to receive a formal request for water for the project.

The District, which provides water and power to all of Imperial County as well as parts of Riverside and San Diego counties, did not have specific estimates of how demand from the data center could impact its costs.

“Water was very concerning to us from the beginning,” Rucci said.

He’s spoken with city officials in Imperial and El Centro to arrange a water deal for the facility, he said, and proposed getting 6 million gallons per day of reclaimed water from both cities.

“Our plan was we would do all the municipal upgrades at our cost, and then we would take the excess water and run it clean to the Salton Sea,” he said.

Those conversations have not paid off, although Rucci said he remains hopeful municipal officials will help him get water for his facility.

“We first tried to do reclaimed water. I still prefer that but that seems to be taking months and I don’t know if that ... will happen,” Rucci said. “Probably we’ll just get it from the (Imperial Irrigation District)” by purchasing it for industrial use.

How the center obtains its water may change as its plans are updated, he added.

Through it all, he remains confident the data center will be built in Imperial County and be good for the area.

Carolina Paez disagrees.

The 46-year-old mother’s backyard abuts the data center site. She says she’d be able to hit it with a rock from her property.

Both she and her son have asthma, and she’s worried about the construction dust, potential pollution and noise from the data center. And higher bills.

“I’m not just thinking about the expenses that are going to increase, but also about the things that are going to lose value—for instance, my house,” Paez said in Spanish.

“What am I going to do with this property? Who would even want to live here?”

Steven Rodas is an environmental and climate reporter for Inside Climate News based in Southern California. He previously reported on the environment in New Jersey, covering energy, pollution, wildlife and development. Steven’s work has appeared in several publications including NJ.com/The Star Ledger, hMAG, The Jersey Journal and The Hudson Reporter. He worked as a copywriter at Google. Steven has a master’s degree from Syracuse University’s S.I. Newhouse School Of Public Communications. He is fluent in English and Spanish (and welcomes your tips).

Glaser
Weil

CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR TALENTED
LITIGATORS RECOGNIZED AMONG

**SD Metro’s 2026
40 Under 40**



Allyson Werner



Alex Miller



Jake Ragan

glaserweil.com

Century City | Newport Beach | San Diego | San Francisco

California Lettuce Growers Regulatory Compliance 1,400% Higher Per Acre Since 2006 When CA Climate Change Bill was Passed

By Katy Grimes | California Globe



Salinas Valley agriculture marred by windmills. (Photo: Katy Grimes for California Globe, April 2026)

A 2025 Cal Poly research paper revealed that California lettuce growers now spend 12.6% of their total production costs on regulatory compliance.

The Cal Poly study, which updated prior analyses in 2006 and 2017, titled “Two Decades of Change: Evolving Costs of Regulatory Compliance in the Produce Industry,” was authored by agribusiness professors Lynn Hamilton and Michael McCullough and commissioned by the Monterey County Farm Bureau. It examines a large-scale commercial lettuce operation (over 1,000 acres) in the Salinas Valley.

The study wasn’t just released, but it is quite relevant today, and demonstrative of how destructive California’s excessive regulatory environment is.

Cal Poly Professors Hamilton and McCullough address the ever-increasing costs of regulation and how they are a constant

concern for California growers.

“An initial study of regulatory costs in California agriculture was conducted in 2006, as means to compare California’s regulatory environment to other competing states,” they report.

However, also in 2006, the California Legislature passed Assembly Bill 32, Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006. Then-Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger signed AB 32 into law, which ordered the state to reduce carbon emissions to 1990 levels by the year 2020, imposing a host of new regulations on every imaginable business in the state.

“Industry groups in the Salinas Valley contacted Cal Poly to update the original study in 2018 as new state and federal laws imposed significantly higher regulatory burdens on growers, specifically with respect to food safety, water quality, labor wages, air quality and worker health and safety,” the authors said. “We used

Table 1. Regulatory Cost Changes for Salinas Valley Lettuce Grower, 2006, 2017 & 2024

Regulatory Category	2006	2017	2024
	Cost per acre		
Education/Training for Regulatory Compliance	\$1.27	\$26.31	\$25.60
Air Quality Requirements	\$0.00	\$5.31	\$8.29
Water Quality/Quantity Requirements	\$4.30	\$18.57	\$29.72
Department of Pesticide Regulation	\$22.98	\$35.55	\$47.59
Food Safety - LGMA and PR	\$0.64	\$181.48	\$244.15
Assessments	\$19.66	\$14.88	\$13.18
Labor Health & Safety Requirements	\$0.00	\$28.72	\$43.71
Worker's Compensation	\$58.94	\$336.23	\$428.40
ACA Requirements	\$0.00	\$141.19	\$334.47
Labor Wage Requirements	\$1.36	\$189.10	\$425.00
Totals (per acre)	\$109.16	\$977.34	\$1,600

2017 data as it was the most recently completed full production year.”

Perhaps most telling is the devastating impact the California Air Resources Board regulations have had on California agriculture.

The study reported some background: [emphasis the Globe]:

The original study in 2006 reported no costs for air quality regulation. By 2017, state laws required more extensive reporting under the AB 32, Global Warming Solutions Act, even for “clear air” areas such as Monterey County. As of May 2007, all agricultural diesel engine equipment, both stationary and mobile, must be registered with the MBARD (Monterey Air Board), and equipment emissions must be monitored (California Air Resources Board). In 2017, the grower reported spending \$5.31 per acre on air quality compliance, the lowest of any category; most of the costs were in staff time to report equipment and emissions information as well as upgrading equipment filters.

In 2020, a new California Air Resources Board rule known as the Truck and Bus Regulation requires all heavy-duty diesel vehicles that operate in California to reduce toxic exhaust emissions. By January 2023, nearly all heavy-duty diesel trucks and buses operating in the state are required to have 2010 or newer model year engines to reduce particulate matter (PM) and nitrogen oxides (NOx) emissions. The ranch’s trucks were found to be non-compliant with the rule in 2024, and the ranch was fined \$1,900. They were required to replace three trucks, which cost \$60,000 each, and are expected to be in service for 10 years. Existing haul trucks had emissions filters upgraded at \$25,000 each; the expected life span is six years. The lettuce grower has two staff members who

each spend 40 hours annually reporting equipment and emissions information to the MBARD. The ranch’s irrigation pumps fall under the Agricultural Diesel Engine Registration, Rule 310, of the MBARD; which requires most stationary diesel-powered engines on agricultural operations to have a permit. The annual fees are \$243 for the first engine and \$173 for each additional engine. The total air quality compliance costs per acre in 2024 was \$8.29, the lowest of all regulatory categories, but an increase of 56% over 2017 costs.

And the results of increased regulatory costs:

In the 2006 study, the cooperating lettuce grower reported regulatory costs totaling \$109.15 per acre or 1.26% of total production costs. Lettuce production costs were \$8,793 per acre. Workers’ compensation comprised over half of regulatory costs in the initial report; other compliance areas included water quality, food safety, worker education and training.

However, by 2017, the regulatory landscape had drastically changed, precipitated by a 2006 E. coli outbreak in spinach in the Salinas Valley (that occurred after the 2006 data was collected) that altered the landscape for food safety compliance. New environmental and worker wage and safety laws were also imposed in the ensuing years. The 2017 data showed that regulatory costs were \$977.30 per acre, or 8.90% of total production costs. The grower’s total production costs were \$10,977 per acre in 2017.

The results of the first comparison case study showed that production costs increased by 24.8% from 2006 to 2017, but the costs of regulatory compliance rose by 795%.

Increased compliance requirements in 2024 bring the grower’s total costs of regulation to \$1,600.12 per acre, which is a 63.7%

increase from 2017 and a 1366% increase since 2006.

What are the areas of regulatory compliance farmers have been hit with?

- Food Safety
- Air Quality
- Water Quality
- Labor Health and Safety
- Labor Wages

Workers' compensation was the highest cost of regulatory compliance and had risen to \$336 per acre.

Labor wage regulations comprised another \$189 per acre food safety compliance followed closely behind at \$181 per acre Affordable Care Act requirements added \$141 per acre pesticide regulatory compliance totaled over \$35 per acre

Other regulatory compliance costs totaled between \$5.50 and \$28 per acre

“The results of the updated case study show that, for this lettuce grower, production costs increased 24.8% from 2006 to 2017, but the costs of regulatory compliance rose by 795%.”

Notably, according to the California Department of Food and Agriculture, California grows 76% of all lettuce in the U.S.

Monterey County, where the data for this study was collected, produces 60% of California's lettuce.

Someone needs to ask California Democrat lawmakers if they are willing to destroy food production in California over the imaginary air quality crisis.

In 2025, the Globe reported that the EPA was about to rescind Obama-era and Biden greenhouse gas regulations:

Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Lee Zeldin is proposing the largest deregulatory action in the history of the United States, by repealing the 2009 Obama EPA “Endangerment Finding,” the central basis for much of the U.S.'s climate policy, which directed all the greenhouse gas regulations on vehicles that followed, and the much despised start/stop feature.

The Endangerment Finding, is a finding under the Clean Air Act that claims greenhouse gases endanger public health and welfare.

The regulation has been used to justify over \$1 trillion in regulations, including the Biden-Harris Administration's electric vehicle (EV) mandate.

And as expected, the EPA rescinded the greenhouse gas endangerment finding on February 12, 2026, which eliminated the legal basis for regulating greenhouse gas emissions from vehicles and engines under the Clean Air Act.

The Cal Poly report identified the major drivers included in the layered rules:

- Education and Training for Regulatory Compliance
- Air Quality Requirements
- Water Quality/Quantity Requirements
- Department of Pesticide Regulation
- Food Safety

Workers Compensation

Affordable Care Act

Labor Health & Safety Requirements

Assessments

Within these categories are the specifics:

Labor (overtime, sick leave, wages, workers' comp, Affordable Care Act requirements) — often the largest category.

Food safety (e.g., post-2006 E. coli-related standards; now ~\$244 per acre, up dramatically from \$0.64 in 2006).

Environmental (water quality, groundwater management, air quality).

Pesticides, worker health/safety training, and various assessments/fees.

With California producing the vast majority of U.S. lettuce, these costs affect national supply and prices. While some regulations target legitimate issues, as the study authors point out, such as food borne illness prevention, and worker protections, the rapid escalation of regulatory costs has dramatically outpaced overall production and revenue. Farmers may be used to thin profit margins, but when regulatory compliance takes 12%+ of costs off of the top without proportional price increases, it diminishes the already thin profitability.

California already has far too much fallowed farm land, mostly over groundwater issues, and now we can add ridiculous and very expensive regulations, which could result in more fallowed land, and reliance on other states or countries for food.

Similar regulatory costs patterns appear in other California crops (e.g., a related Cal Poly look at wine grapes). The state's regulatory stack of labor, water, air, and safety creates a uniquely high burden compared to other U.S. growing regions.

As the Globe has been pointing out for many years, California already surpassed its original greenhouse gas emissions reductions target of 1990 levels of by 2020 – this was achieved in 2016 – even the Governor's Climate Dashboard website admitted this:

“The 2006 California Global Warming Solutions Act (Assembly Bill 32) set a target to reduce greenhouse gas emissions back to 1990 levels by 2020. California surpassed this target four years early in 2016, and emissions have continued to drop since then, largely due to increasing technology. California's next climate target is to reduce emissions by 40% below 1990 levels by 2030. The Scoping Plan lays out how California will achieve this target.”

This is why California Democrats have worked so hard to keep moving the goal posts – we already are a clean state, with some of the cleanest air in the world.

Fortunately, EPA Administrator Zeldin is on to this climate grift. And the Cal Poly professors' data and analysis proves this.

The Medi-Cal fraud loophole Gavin Newsom doesn't want you to know about

By Jonathan Ingram | CA Post

Vice President JD Vance needs to prioritize one policy change above all others as he leads the Trump administration's crackdown on fraud in California and elsewhere: closing a loophole that is allowing thousands of illegal aliens to receive Medicaid.

Here's the loophole:

Federal law requires states to verify the citizenship or immigration status of people who apply for Medicaid (which is Medi-Cal in California), but gives them a "reasonable opportunity period" to provide documentation.

The minimum grace period is 90 days, under federal regulations, a long grace period. But bureaucrats have stretched it into permanent enrollment, funneling our tax dollars to illegal aliens who shouldn't even be in the country.

States add to the problem by granting new "reasonable opportunity periods" to the same people over and over again, keeping illegal aliens on Medicaid indefinitely.

For example, one Utah Medicaid applicant has been enrolled for 5,820 days without proving their immigration status. That is 16 years of welfare without proof of eligibility.

Think back to where you were 16 years ago. The iPad didn't exist, Blockbuster Video still had thousands of stores, and three in four Americans still had a landline.

That enrollee has been drawing Medicaid benefits every single day since, while state officials wait for proof of citizenship that has never come.

But Utah is not even an outlier. Seven in 10 "temporary" Medicaid cases now exceed 90 days, and the federal government allows it.

Explore More

What's more, Governor Gavin Newsom's California may be the worst offender of all, but his administration doesn't want you to know it.

When my organization filed a public records request to find out how many people are exploiting these extensions, the California Department of Health Care Services strung us along for four months, with delay after delay, before it demanded \$182,000 to produce the data.

Apparently, the Newsom administration needs its own "reasonable opportunity period" when it comes to transparency.

In total, an estimated 700,000 people receive these "reasonable opportunity periods" each year, a population larger than Washington, D.C., costing taxpayers millions of dollars.

California's top news, sports and entertainment delivered to your inbox every day.

The Medicaid program is on track to lose \$2 trillion to waste, fraud, and abuse over the next decade. More than one in five dol-

lars spent on the program is improper, and eligibility errors drive more than 80 percent of that.

Taxpayers are spending billions of dollars every year on people who were never eligible in the first place, or who stayed enrolled long after their circumstances changed.

During the Biden border crisis, the number of applicants who couldn't prove their immigration status exploded nearly five-fold, as more illegal aliens came flooding in and states kept extending benefits to people with no legal right to them.

The Biden administration even formalized this blatant abuse, requiring states to keep granting grace periods to the same applicants.

Although President Trump has solved the border crisis, the problem of illegal aliens receiving welfare is far from solved. In fact, now these outrageous welfare abuses could even get worse.

Left-wing groups are lobbying states to adopt "One Door" eligibility systems, which some states already use to enroll applicants in every welfare program at once if they apply for any of them.

These systems are designed to maximize enrollment, even if it means more fraud and abuse by those who aren't even eligible for benefits.

After a certain point, reasonable opportunity periods aren't so reasonable. The Trump administration should limit a reasonable opportunity period to 30 days, which is more than enough time for law-abiding people to track down missing paperwork.

Additionally, states should limit each applicant to one reasonable opportunity period instead of opening new ones over and over again for the same people.

States also need to hold illegal aliens accountable if they try to get tax dollars for which they are not eligible. If an applicant's verification fails, states should share this information with immigration enforcement, as Louisiana and Indiana already do. Not only are these applicants here illegally, but they are also attempting to steal from taxpayers.

Ultimately, Congress should change the law and require pre-enrollment verification. It should end the reasonable opportunity period loophole entirely. Congress should also require states to follow Louisiana and Indiana's lead in referring illegal aliens to immigration authorities when they try to steal welfare.

The Vice President's anti-fraud task force has a tall task ahead of it, but there are few easier steps to take than this one. Sixteen years of waste, fraud, and abuse of our tax dollars is enough.

It is time to close this loophole once and for all.

Jonathan Ingram is vice president of policy and research at the Foundation for Government Accountability.

YEREVAN

The traveling couple of Marlise Kast Myers and Benjamin Myers

By Marlise Kast-Myers | Photos by Benjamin Myers

There's this habit I have, of looking at a map and selecting countries I know little about. Such was the case with Armenia, except for a reel that teased hiking, winemaking, and a cultural renaissance that made me want to visit sooner than later.

My husband, Benjamin agreed to join my crusade for trails and grapes, and away we went, landing in Yerevan, the capital and largest city in Armenia. Despite the 1 AM arrival, jetlag had us wired, chatting up our driver about everything from politics to population. Nodding, he asked Chat GPT for answers.

With a national population of roughly 3 million, Yerevan housed roughly a third. As we rolled into our hotel, it seemed the majority of Yerevanites were out that night. Even in the lobby of The Alexander, the bellman explained Armenia's a late-to-bed, late-to-rise culture. Winking at my husband, I knew we were off to a good start.

Beyond the marble lobby and crystal chandeliers was an elevator that took us to our room, where turndown service left a platter of dried apricots, peaches, and plums. That night we slept deep, clouded in luxurious Frette linens, heated floors, and metallic silk pillows.

Acclimating our senses was rooftop breakfast served by a gra-

acious staff who introduced us to Armenian coffee—finely ground into a powder and brewed in a jazzve pot. Ruby pomegranate juice brightened the table beside yogurt, figs, honey, olives, pastries, brined cheeses (chanakh and lori), cured beef (basturma), and other local delights.

Following breakfast, we met Lusine Guin Dalera, our guide and owner of Next Is Armenia. During Covid, she launched her business which gained traction with viral videos introducing the other side of Armenia. Over the next five days, she would be our driver, translator, historian, and magician unveiling that “other side.”

Within minutes, the entrepreneur was walking us through Yerevan—one of the oldest continuously-inhabited cities in the world. Lusine rattled off dates and facts, as if reading a history book that had yet to be finished. Founded nearly 2,800 years ago, Yerevan became the capital of the Armenian republic in 1918. Situated at the crossroads of empires—from Persian and Roman to Byzantine, Arab, and Ottoman—it has long been shaped by conquest and survival. At first glance, their story of resilience wasn't something that could be seen.

In the Lori region, this 5.6 mile-long trail travels from Kobayr Monastery through Horomayr Monastery all the way to Odzun Church.

At the center of the action was Republic Square, ringed by government buildings and the History Museum with a collection of roughly 400,000 artifacts, documents, and archaeological findings including the world's oldest leather shoe from 3500 BCE.

Outside the museum, Lusine pointed out neoclassical-style architecture in pink and yellow tufa stone, harmonizing with waterfalls, fountains, and pools in an urban ensemble. Webbing from grand facades were narrow streets where cats sunned in doorways and artisans claimed corners for their craft, unfolding a space of inclusive second chances.

We saw it in the hand-chiseled crosses (Khachkars), symbols of faith intricately carved from volcanic tuff. Lusine waved us into an unattended shack, sheltered by tarp walls housing half-a-dozen of these works in progress. Centering each crucifix was an eternal knot representing the strength of the Armenian faith. Long before Christianity spread across Europe, Armenia quietly became the first nation to adopt it in 301 AD. It was a decision that still shapes the landscape today. We saw it firsthand over lunch at Tumanyan's ART.

It was the coffee and zhengyalov hats (stuffed flatbreads) that lured us to this neighborhood restaurant, but a heart of hope that left us in tears. At the center of it all was owner, Kristina Balayan who served us dolmas, trout, pickled vegetables, roasted potatoes, lubu shorva (red bean soup), and other specialties.

Before opening her restaurant in Yerevan, Tumanyan ART stood in Stepanakert, Artsakh's capital. It operated as a restaurant and school for children with special needs. After the 2020 "44-Day War" reshaped the Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh) region, renewed fighting in September 2023 led to the displacement of Artsakh's population.

Among those in the crossfire was Kristina who refused to close her restaurant during the nine-month blockade. Instead, the cafe

became a place of sustenance where she improvised daily with the few supplies she had. Despite the mass exodus, Kristina stayed behind to feed the hungry, becoming one of the last to travel through the Lachin Corridor.

Upon arriving in Yerevan, Kristina joined World Central Kitchen to feed the displaced, eventually opening Tumanyan's ART in December 2023. From orphans to widows, thousands of Armenians have found nourishment from this community protagonist, who is still comforting children who habitually ration their birthday cake.

Still, Kristina pours us wine and insists on raising a glass to "peace."

Having endured all that, I didn't know how Armenians had the courage to find joy. As Lusine explained, "We can't live in fear of today simply because the uncertainty of tomorrow."

In Saryan Square, it seemed people were finding that joy, artists setting up easels and brushing color on canvases in this living gallery. Just off the Yerevan Opera House, this vibrant square celebrated Armenia's deep ties to France, with Parisian-style cafes, a statue of Charles Aznavour, and flower carts stacked with fresh roses—so perfectly petaled, you'd swear they were photoshopped into life.

Just uphill, the Cafesjian Center for the Arts anchored the iconic Cascade, a pyramid-shaped complex doubling as one of Yerevan's most important cultural spaces. Outside were tiered fountains with views spanning across the city to Mount Ararat. At the base of the terraces were sculpture gardens featuring Fernando Botero's chubby bronze feline, El Gato, and Ji Yong-Ho's black Lion, assembled from recycled tires.

By sunset we were counting fibers at the Megerian Carpet Museum. Ironically, the famed business launched in New York, where Armenian immigrant Hovannes John Megerian, started



Traditional Armenian cuisine is served at Tumanyan's ART in Yerevan, a restaurant serving hope in every dish.



Just outside Alaverdi, Mendz Er Cave (Big Cave) houses a small museum beside a restaurant overlooking Debed Canyon.

restoring rugs in 1917. Leaning on natural dyes and double-knot methods, he revitalized the craft and established a cultural hub in Armenia with factories, museums, and showrooms. With over 22 weaving facilities across the country, Megerian has become a major force in preserving the heritage. On their client list was everyone from Pope Francis to Kim Kardashian.

From carpet factories to blanketed hillsides, we headed north into the Debed River Valley, where cool misty air smelled of fire and fruit. Located in Armenia's Lori Province, the deep gorge stretches from Vanadzor to the Georgian border. Cradled in the hillsides are UNESCO-listed monasteries and centuries-old settlements, drawing more visitors than the trails and rivers below. We came for all of the above, with history before hiking, starting with the Sanahin Monastery.

Founded in the 10th century, this complex of churches was a crucible of wisdom for calligraphers, philosophers, and illuminators. Despite the passing of time, rays of light broke into the darkness through crowned domes and arched windows.

Nearby was Haghpat Monastery, also named a UNESCO World Heritage site as the pinnacle of Armenian architecture. Among gravesites and crooked slabs, this medieval tapestry of bell towers, vaulted corridors, and sacred frescoes whispered tales of faith and persecution.

Just outside Alaverdi, Mendz Er Cave (Big Cave) was next on our route. Once believed to have sheltered early humans, the cave now housed a museum beside a restaurant, where we lunched on wraps and clay-pot stews reminiscent of shepherds' fondue.

While admiring views across Debed Canyon, I heard the cry

of a kitten, meowing for scraps and making figure 8s between my husband's boots. In Armenia, strays are often tagged, a sign they have been neutered and released. Regardless, I wanted to save them all . . . feed, heal, and take them home. The more I learned about Armenia, the more I wanted to rescue it from the past. But Armenia didn't need rescuing. It needed understanding.

Just ask Vigen Mnatsakanyan, owner of ARMBEE Honey Farm and Meadery. Fifteen years ago, the beekeeper inherited two hives from his grandfather in Alaverdi. Today Vigen is considered the swami of the craft, with over 300 hives, an education center, smart hive software, and a boutique hotel with "bee beds" for apitherapy. He shared his vision to open a honey-centric restaurant, and in the meantime, we sampled from the comb and wine that convinced us Vigen could save the world, one bee at a time.

That evening, we checked into Tufenkian Avan Dzoraget Hotel where stone architecture melded into the Debed River. Resembling a medieval Armenian fortress, rooms boasted arched doorways, stone flooring, and handwoven Tufenkian carpets.

By day we hiked from Kobayr Monastery to Odzun Church, our trail slicing through the gorge past ruins of Horomayr—one of 4,000 religious structures in Armenia. Holding the pack was our guide from Hike Armenia, who corralled us through the verdant passage while pointing out rhythms of rural life. Farmers gathered walnuts into leather pouches beside hedgerows laden with berries, pears, plums, and cornelian cherries.

Our trek ended in the village of Odzun, famous for its church constructed around the 5th–7th century. Beyond religion, we visited the local TUMO center, Armenia's free technology program

for teens—a reminder that even in one of the country's oldest landscapes, the future was being quietly shaped.

That night over dinner, the electricity suddenly went out; an anomaly for us, a common occurrence for them. Our guide Lusine didn't miss a beat, telling us about Armenia's exports of precious metals, tea, and brandy, and how river rafting was best May to October. I looked around, as conversation continued without pause or panic.

Candles were delivered tableside, and I had to ask about the absence of discomfort and chaos.

"This was all we knew during the 'Cold and Dark Years,'" Lusine said.

In the early 1990s after the collapse of the Soviet Union, electricity in Yerevan flickered for as little as an hour a day. Lusine recounted days of homework by candlelight and the cheers when light would return. Daily life was reshaped during the energy crisis with the shutdown of Armenia's nuclear plant, frozen rivers preventing hydroelectricity, and blockades cutting natural gas.

"Winters were brutal," she explained. "But we never complained because there was always someone enduring more."

Babies were delivered in darkness, entire neighborhoods huddled in one warm home, and trees disappeared from parks with each "giving tree" chopped for firewood. The hardships sparked mass emigration and economic collapse, leaving an even deeper mark—one that still surfaces in quiet dinners with strangers like us.

The following morning echoed that past, a drive along barren roads dotted with abandoned factories. Climbing toward 4,600 feet, we headed to Tavush Province toward Apaga Resort in Yenokavan. Opened in 2003, this property in the clouds had cozy rooms in freestanding structures. Outside were grazing horses, raising their heads at nothing greener than the earth.

Yell Extreme Park was part of the property, a hub for adventure with horseback riding, zip-lining, rock climbing, off-roading, and hiking. Elaborate meals were served in a glass-walled restaurant overlooking the valley, where paper-thin lavash came with platters of tree mushrooms, lamb, and trout.

As the trip drew to a close, we stopped at Haghartsin Monastery, where Lusine lured us with gata, flaky Armenian pastries filled with blueberry, lemon, and figs. Beyond those fragrant fillings was a rich history of the monastery dating back to the 10th century. Once favored by scientists and royalty, Haghartsin now holds the graves of kings.

En route, we learned about Armenia's wine renaissance, now guided in part by Vahe Keushguerian considered "Godfather of Armenian winemaking." As owner of the Keush winery, Vahe and his daughter Aimee helped shift the industry from survival to intention.

Investment followed, as did renewed interest at home and abroad, fueled in part by discoveries at Areni Cave, one of the world's oldest winemaking sites. In Vayots Dzor Highlands, winemakers at Trinity Canyon vineyards are returning to organic practices, fermenting wines in clay amphorae, and embracing styles like amber wines. Once only a handful of drinkable wines, Armenia now produces more than 500 native grape varieties.

Heading back to Yerevan, we stopped for lunch at Sevan Yasa-

man Restaurant on the shores of Lake Sevan. As the country's largest lake, it's often called "The Pearl of Armenia." Clouds rolled in, darkening the water and bringing in a storm we never predicted.

Our timing was off. Back on the highway, the rearview mirror showed the clouds had lifted, the waters were still, and a rainbow had arched across the sky.

"We need to stop," I told Lusine. "This is the best photo of the trip!"

She explained there was no exit, no shoulder, and no way to turn back. A guardrail was blocking the view, and so, we had to admire the moment from where we stood.

The irony wasn't lost on me.

Within reach was the color of hope, in a land where borders have meaning, where honey flows, and fruit ripens under a generous sun; Where wine isn't a trend but rather a reclaiming of something ancient to be reshaped for the present; Where stone churches rise from volcanic hills, monasteries cling to cliffs, and crosses are carved with eternal knots that strengthen with pull and tension.

Where monuments translate to "We are our mountains" and warriors raise a glass to "peace"; Where resilience is not learned but rather intrinsic, in a country where yes, at first glance, that story cannot be seen . . .but with time, it can be understood.



Rosettes and eternal knots on Armenian Khachkars (cross-stones) are intricately carved from volcanic tuff.

The Gulf is Pivoting Their Economy Fast: Follow the Money

By Editors at the Prickley Pear

Gulf monarchies—led by Saudi Arabia and the UAE—are executing a massive, two-pronged financial strategy. The recent turmoil in the Middle East is serious, but the overall strategy remains in place. They are aggressively diversifying their economies to survive a post-oil world while simultaneously deploying “soft power” to pivot their global reputations away from human rights controversies and toward high-end tourism and innovation.



The Golden Goose of Sports

Arab nations are using professional athletics as a primary vehicle for brand rehabilitation (sportswashing) and domestic entertainment growth.

Massive Infrastructure: Saudi Arabia is currently building 15 “smart stadiums” and expects its sports market to hit \$22.4 billion by 2030, a staggering jump from \$1.3 billion in 2016.

Global Events: The region has secured hosting rights for the 2034 FIFA World Cup, the Asian Games, and high-profile Formula 1, golf (LIV), and boxing events to position themselves as the world’s “central hub” for sports.

AI & Tech Arms Race

Gulf states are moving from “passive capital” (buying stocks) to strategic capabilities (building the tech themselves).

Data Center Hegemony: The UAE recently launched “Stargate UAE,” a 5-gigawatt AI data center in Abu Dhabi, set to be one of the largest outside the U.S., in collaboration with OpenAI and Nvidia.

Sovereign Spending: In 2025, Saudi Arabia’s Public Investment Fund (PIF) became the world’s most active sovereign wealth fund, deploying \$36.2 billion into sectors like AI, genomics, and gaming.

Future Resilience: Funds like Qatar’s QIA and Saudi’s PIF are prioritizing climate tech and biotech to ensure long-term economic resilience as the world transitions away from hydrocarbons.

Economic Diversification (Vision 2030)

The goal is a “post-oil” economy where the private sector, not the government, drives the engine.

Non-Oil Growth: As of early 2026, Saudi Arabia’s non-oil activities grew by 2.8% year-over-year, now accounting for 55% of the Kingdom’s total GDP.

Renewable Energy & Logistics: Saudi Arabia’s renewable energy market is projected to grow by 42.9% in 2026. The Public Investment Fund (PIF) has a target of generating 44.5 GW of renewable energy, part of a broader national goal of 100 GW to make the Kingdom a top exporter of green hydrogen.

Private Sector Rise: The contribution of the private sector to the Saudi economy has reached 51%, a key milestone in their push to reduce state dependence.

Strategic Tourism: By investing in “fun” and “friendliness” metrics, the UAE and Saudi Arabia are climbing global Soft Power rankings, with Saudi Arabia jumping to 17th place globally in 2026.

Mining & Mineral “Gold Rush”: In 2025 alone, Saudi Arabia’s mining exploration budget surged to \$146 million, a nearly 700% increase from 2022. By early 2026, mining licenses in the Kingdom surged by 220%

What This Means For You

The Culture War: You’re seeing a “New Middle East” that is aggressively pro-business and socially “modernizing” (on their terms) while remaining staunchly traditional in governance. They are trying to thread a needle by pitching an alternative to Western liberal capitalism: economic progress without the “woke” social baggage.

National Security: The shift from Petrodollars to Data-dollars means the U.S. is losing its primary leverage (energy dependence). As the Gulf builds massive AI clusters with Nvidia chips, they are becoming the “Switzerland of Tech”—playing both sides (U.S. and China) to maximize their own sovereignty.

What to Look for Next

Keep an eye on these indicators over the next 18 months.

“Dual-Sourcing” Strategy: Watch if the UAE or Saudi Arabia sign major defense or tech deals with China while simultaneously hosting U.S. data centers. A “non-aligned” stance is potentially the biggest threat to U.S. hegemony in the region.

IPO Wave: Look for “NEOM” or other massive Saudi “Giga-projects” to seek public listings. This will be the ultimate test of whether Western institutional investors actually trust their updated brand enough to put long-term skin in the game.

World Cup 2034 Sourcing: As the Saudi World Cup approaches, watch the labor and construction contracts. If they successfully pivot to “automated/robotic construction” to avoid migrant labor PR disasters, it will signal a more permanent evolution in their economic model.

As the Gulf trades crude oil for “data-dollars” and high-stakes cultural capital, the West must prepare for a multipolar world where the Middle East is moving to dictate the terms of innovation and entertainment. The question isn’t whether they will succeed, but whether American interests can adapt before the global table is permanently reset.



**SAN DIEGO'S
MOST INNOVATIVE
LAW FIRMS
Nominate at
sandiegometro.com**

SDMETRO
your business your life

At Our Peril: Ignoring the Canary in the Coal Mine of Arts and Culture Defunding

By Linda Caballero Sotelo | Voice of San Diego



San Diego City Hall in downtown San Diego, on Jan. 13, 2025. / Photo by Vito di Stefano for Voice of San Diego

Over a recent phone conversation, a friend conveyed her sense of disillusionment with how cities are being managed. The expression “tone-deaf” came up, and that warnings are all around us. Across the United States, cities are making budget decisions that reveal far more than their fiscal priorities. They reveal their values, their imagination, and their sense of responsibility to future generations.

In San Diego, the mayor’s proposed budget would virtually eliminate nearly the entire \$12 million arts and culture budget, effectively dismantling the cultural ecosystem of educational organizations filling the gaps for student art education-based programming, artist support to produce works that attracts visitors and creates a livable and forward city to enjoy, visit and invest in. An ecosystem that extends across borders and has taken decades

to build.

This is not simply a budget cut. It is a cultural alarm, a canary in the coal mine warning us about the direction of our civic life. Tough budget decisions need to be made but they should be in balance and proportion among city departments, given the arts and culture budget for San Diego represents less than 1 percent of the city’s general fund. This will not solve the deficit, and it is just not proportional to reductions in other departments. Simply put, these drastic cuts are draconian, shortsighted, and contradictory to prioritizing the communities that city leaders claim to prioritize.

For centuries, societies have understood that arts, culture, and the humanities are not decorative luxuries but foundational civic infrastructure. The ancient Greeks embedded theater, philosophy, and public art into the daily life of their cities because they

believed that a healthy democracy required imagination, debate, and shared cultural rituals. Aztec empires and Renaissance cities invested heavily in artists and scholars because they recognized that creativity fuels innovation, economic vitality, and civic pride. Today, global cities that lead in technology, science, and economic competitiveness are the same cities that invest deeply in cultural life.

San Diego's proposed cuts stand in stark contrast to this long historical arc. They also contradict the commitments we make on the international stage. Just recently the mayor signed a Sister Cities agreement with Marseille, France, a city that invests robustly in its cultural institutions and where arts and culture are one of the three central pillars of the partnership. Marseille understands what many global cities understand: cultural investment is a strategy for economic development, social cohesion, and international identity. To sign such an agreement while simultaneously gutting our own cultural infrastructure sends a confusing and, perhaps unintentional, message about our seriousness as a global city.

Doris Sommer of Harvard University, a leading literary scholar of civic culture, often reminds policymakers that Susan Magsamen's statement "art is not the decoration of democracy, it is the engine" is apt for our times. Sommer's research and practice demonstrate that cultural participation strengthens literacy, civic engagement, and problem-solving, precisely the capacities a diverse democracy requires to function, and the skills cities need to navigate complex futures. When a city defunds its cultural sector, it's not trimming fat. It's weakening its civic muscle.

The consequences are not abstract. San Diego's arts and culture organizations from youth theaters and community festivals to cultural centers and museums serve more than a million residents annually. They provide after-school programs, mental health support, intergenerational learning, and spaces for young people to explore identity and belonging. They anchor neighborhoods, attract tourism, and generate economic activity. The arts sector contributes billions to San Diego's economy yet receives a fraction of one percent of the city budget.

For decades, San Diego has failed to honor its own "penny for the arts" commitment, a 2012 promise that would have stabilized funding requiring the city to spend 1 percent, a penny, of all hotel room revenue on grants to cultural organizations, aligning us with other major cities. Instead, we are now contemplating erasure: the disappearance of programs that help children see themselves as creators; the loss of cultural spaces that preserve immigrant histories; the silencing of artistic interventions that challenge us to question and imagine better futures.

Philosophers, economists, and urban theorists have long argued that a city's cultural life is a leading indicator of its future. As Malcolm Gladwell might frame it, we are approaching a tipping point, a moment when small decisions accumulate into irreversible change. If we allow cultural defunding to become normalized, we risk becoming a city that cannot imagine itself forward. If this is not our tipping point, what is? San Diego stands at a crossroads.

We can choose austerity, short-term thinking, and the slow erosion of civic life. Or we can choose to honor the commitments we make to our children, to our communities, to our international partners, and to the generations who will inherit the city we shape today.

What does it say about a city's leadership when it places zero value on the artistic and cultural contributions that shape civic identity? What does it say when we ignore decades of evidence that arts and culture are economic drivers, public health strategies, and youth development lifelines? What does it say when we invest more in law enforcement than in expression, more in reaction than in prevention?

The canary in the coal mine is singing loudly. The question now is whether we will listen and whether we will act before the silence becomes permanent.

Linda Caballero Sotelo is a cultural policy strategist, scholar and advisor working at the intersection of arts, culture, democracy, and community belonging. She advises national and international institutions on cultural infrastructure, public policy and civic engagement. She is a research associate of Cultural Agents Initiative at Harvard. She is based in San Diego.

SERVING SAN DIEGO, LOS ANGELES AND IRVINE

RJS LAW
A TAX LAW FIRM

TAX AUDITS, CIVIL & CRIMINAL TAX LITIGATION

- IRS Audits
- IRS Appeals
- IRS Collections
- OIC / Settlement
- Criminal Tax
- Innocent Spouse Relief
- Payroll Tax
- OVDP / Voluntary Disclosure
- SBOE / Sales Tax
- FTB / State Tax
- Estate Tax
- International Tax
- Corporate Law
- Real Estate Law
- EDD / California State Payroll Tax

Ronson J. Shamoun, Principal Attorney and CEO of RJS Law, is an Adjunct Law Professor at the University of San Diego—School of Law where he teaches a Tax Practice and Penalties class. He was recently presented with the following awards:

- San Diego Metro Magazine- Best Attorney 2016
- San Diego Magazine- Top Attorney 2016
- San Diego Business Journal- Best of the Bar 2014, 2015 & 2016
- Martindale Hubbell- AC Preeminent Rated 2014, 2015 & 2016
- San Diego Daily Transcript- Top Attorney 2014 & 2015
- San Diego Metro Magazine- 40 Under 40 - 2015

SAN DIEGO'S BEST
ATTORNEYS
2014 - 2016

FULL SERVICE STAFF OF 9 ATTORNEYS & 2 CPAs

619-777-7700

RJSLawFirm.com

SAN DIEGO: 303 A STREET STE 400 SAN DIEGO, CA 92101
IRVINE: 12 PARK PLAZA STE. 125B IRVINE, CA 92614 BEVERLY HILLS: 8484 WILSHIRE BLVD. STE 210 BEVERLY HILLS, CA 90211

The ‘payer’ in ‘single-payer’ health care is government — and you

By Linda Caballero Sotelo | Voice of San Diego

Tom Steyer, the controversial billionaire who ran unsuccessfully for president, is trying to appeal to California voters with a “single-payer” health care policy.

He is not alone. Former Congresswoman Katie Porter and former Health and Human Services Secretary Xavier Becerra also proclaim their support for single-payer.

Together, these three are California’s highest-polling Democrats running for governor. And with support for “single-payer,” they are united behind what would be one of the biggest expansions of government power ever proposed in this state.

“Single-payer” sounds technical. Clean. Almost harmless. What it means is that the government pays the bills. Which means, ultimately, the taxpayer.

When Steyer, Porter and Becerra say California needs sin-

gle-payer health care, they mean a government-run financing system that would replace private insurance as the main payer of health care costs.

In fact, as it’s been introduced in the legislature, it would prohibit private insurance companies from providing any services offered by the newly mandated government health care program. So even if you like what you have now, it will be gone as you know it under this new regime.

And the state of California would become the dominant financial gatekeeper for health care for nearly 40 million people.

That is the ballgame. Under single-payer, existing health care plans in California would be displaced by one giant government plan. Employer coverage, union-negotiated plans, private individual policies, and much of the current insurance market would be pushed aside.



Think less “consumer choice” and more government control. Start with the cost. The commonly cited estimate, based on prior single-payer analyses, is roughly \$392 billion a year. Not over a decade. Just for each year.

California’s entire 2025-26 state budget is about \$321 billion, including roughly \$228 billion from the General Fund.

So the gross annual price tag for this new government health care system would exceed the entire current state budget and be about \$164 billion more than the General Fund itself.

That is not reform. That is creating a second state government, devoted almost entirely to health care.

The money has to come from somewhere.

And no, you could not remotely come close to paying for this spending behemoth by taxing billionaires.

That is where the sales pitch collapses.

Steyer can talk about taxing billionaires and corporations. Of course he can. That is the applause line, especially from a billionaire trying to sell himself as a tribune of the people.

But the math does not work. Even confiscatory taxes on billionaires would not come close to covering a recurring annual cost approaching \$400 billion.

That is why previous California single-payer financing proposals went much further in proposing taxes. The prior CalCare tax plan included a gross receipts tax on businesses; payroll taxes on employers and employees; and higher personal income taxes.

In other words, businesses pay. Workers pay. Employers pay. Households pay. Consumers pay indirectly when costs get passed along.

This is the oldest trick in Sacramento. Sell a massive government expansion as if someone else will pay for it. Then the program launches, costs explode, and everyone finds out they are “someone else.”

Then comes the bureaucracy.

A California single-payer system would entail a state-run health care financing apparatus with a governing board, a trust fund, rules, waivers, mandates, rate-setting, reimbursement disputes, and political pressure over what is covered, who gets paid, and how much.

Supporters call that “streamlining.”

Californians who have dealt with the DMV, the unemployment department, homelessness programs, high-speed rail, Medi-Cal backlogs, or wildfire bureaucracy may call it something else.

And what happens when costs exceed projections? Sacramento has only a few choices: raise taxes, cut provider payments, restrict access, delay care, narrow coverage, or pretend none of it is happening until the next budget crisis.

Californians do not need a policy seminar to understand the basic problem. When the government becomes the payer, it becomes the center of power. It decides how much money is available, how much providers get paid, what gets covered, what gets delayed, and what gets squeezed.

Our health care system has serious problems. Premiums, deductibles, drug costs and provider networks are squeezing families and employers.

But much of that dysfunction is already the product of decades of government mandates, regulations, subsidies, tax distortions, and political meddling.

Steyer looks at a system made worse by government intervention and concludes the answer is vastly more government intervention.

That is not reform. That is doubling down on the disease and calling it the cure.

There is a reason California’s Democratic supermajority keeps failing to pass single-payer. They love the slogan, rallies, and union applause.

Then the numbers show up. The tax hikes appear. The private insurance disruption becomes clear. Federal waiver questions pile up. Suddenly, even Sacramento Democrats discover caution.

Single-payer is popular as a slogan because it obscures the trade-offs. Government-run health care is less popular when voters understand the price tag, taxes, bureaucracy and loss of control.

When they say “single-payer,” here’s what they aren’t telling you: The payer, ultimately, is you.

Jon Fleischman, a longtime strategist in California politics, writes at SoDoesItMatter.com.

GoldenCare
A Concierge Care Company

Need In-Home Care?

Call Golden Care
for a *free* home
assessment!

We are a concierge care company
and treat you like family.

(760) 828-5201 | getgoldencare.com

1937 Mercedes-Benz 540K Special Roadster Awarded 'Best in Show' at 20th Annual La Jolla Concours d'Elegance



The La Jolla Concours d'Elegance concluded its milestone 20th anniversary on Sunday, April 26, welcoming thousands of collectors and enthusiasts to La Jolla's coastline for three days of automotive excellence celebrating this year's theme, "Icons of Speed: Historically Significant Super Cars." The coveted Best in Show honor was awarded to the 1937 Mercedes-Benz 540K Special Roadster from The Lyon Collection.

Introduced at the 1936 Paris Salon, the 540K represented the pinnacle of pre-war luxury motoring. Powered by a 5.4-liter supercharged inline-eight, it produced up to 180 horsepower – enough to exceed 100 mph, a remarkable feat for its time. Fully independent suspension, hydraulic brakes, and a four-speed gearbox placed it among the most advanced grand touring cars of its era.

It was the coachwork, however, that set the Special Roadster apart. Built by the factory's own carrosserie at Sindelfingen, the Spezial-Roadster body featured long sweeping fenders, a raked vee'd windshield, low-cut doors with disappearing windows, and a concealed top stowed flush behind the cockpit. Fewer than twenty-six examples were produced before the war, reserved for an elite international clientele.

The Lyon Collection, assembled by the late Major General William Lyon and continued by his family, is among the most significant private collections of pre-war automobiles in the American West. Its 540K's recognition at La Jolla honors both the car's engineering legacy and the careful stewardship that has preserved it into its tenth decade.

"The 'Icons of Speed' theme delivered one of the most extraordinary fields we've ever seen, from pre-war masterpieces like the Lyon Collection's 540K to modern hypercars like the Pagani Zonda Revolucion," said Chris Peterson, Co-Chairman of the La Jolla Concours d'Elegance. "That breadth of automotive history, set against the Pacific, is exactly why collectors from around the world make La Jolla a destination."

Set on the lawn of Ellen Browning Scripps Park overlooking the Pacific, Sunday's grand Concours featured 116 meticulously presented automobiles spanning 15 classes and 14 specialty awards. This year's theme examined the evolution of automotive performance through historically significant supercars and engineering milestones.

While the Concours celebrates automotive excellence, its roots remain firmly tied to the La Jolla community. "The La Jolla Concours has always been about more than cars, it's a celebration that belongs to the entire La Jolla village," said Mike Herman, Co-Chairman of the La Jolla Concours d'Elegance. "What makes me especially proud is our partnership with the San Diego Automotive Museum. Their involvement goes far beyond sponsorship; they bring our youth judges and help cultivate the next generation of automotive enthusiasts right here in San Diego. Seeing young people on that field, engaged and passionate about automotive history, is exactly the kind of community impact this event was built for."

That sense of community has been central to the event's growth over the past 20 years. "This 20th anniversary Concours captures everything we've been building toward over the past two decades," said Michael Dorvillier, Honorary Chairman of the La Jolla Concours d'Elegance. "We've grown from a local gathering into an internationally respected Concours, with a continued focus on not only presenting historically significant automobiles at the highest level but delivering an entire weekend of events that embody the feeling of La Jolla."

The festivities began Friday evening with Motorvault: Masterpieces of Motion, Mystique, and Mastery, the event's VIP Opening Soirée held on the Concours lawn. Guests stepped into a world of rare automobiles and refined indulgence with live entertainment complemented by craft cocktails and tastings from 20 of San Diego's top restaurants. Designed as a hidden vault of coveted machines, the evening offered an exclusive first look at

select Concours vehicles in an evening shrouded in mystery.

Saturday morning brought the La Jolla Tour d'Elegance, gathering 86 participants on Prospect Street before a scenic drive through coastal San Diego and inland toward Rancho Santa Fe, including a stop at a local enthusiast's collection of Porsches and Ferraris.

On Saturday evening, Porsches & Power on Prospect transformed the heart of La Jolla Village into a free community car show for thousands of guests, featuring 75 Porsches, exotic supercars, and hypercars alongside live music, gallery receptions, and village-wide dining and retail experiences.

On Sunday, the Concours field showcased a world-class range of automobiles judged on elegance, technical merit, authenticity, and historical significance. Adjacent to the main event, the La Jolla Motor Car Classic invited the broader community to participate through a free public display of 72 classic, luxury, vintage, and enthusiast vehicles, reinforcing the event's inclusive, village-wide spirit.

Please find a full list of winners below and at www.lajollaconcours.com. The 21st Annual La Jolla Concours d'Elegance will return April 23–25, 2027.

2026 LA JOLLA CONCOURS D'ELEGANCE SPECIALTY WINNERS

BEST IN SHOW

William Lyon, 1937 Mercedes Benz 540K Special Roadster

OUTSTANDING PRE-WAR

Valerie & Aaron Weiss, 1933 Marmon V16 2 Door Convertible Coupe

OUTSTANDING POST-WAR

Jonathan & Wendy Segal, 1955 Maserati A6GCS/53 Spyder

Mayor's Award

Robert Escalante, 1947 Packard 2126 Super Clipper Sedan

Spirit of the Concours Award

Harry Rieger, 1963 Corvette Sting Ray

Aubrey Taylor Award of Excellence for Best Upholstery

Speed Legend Garage LLC, 1955 Mercedes Benz 300 SL

Phillip Wichard Trophy for Excellence in Design

Petersen Museum, 1938/1947 Delahaye Type 145 Chapron Coupe

Chief Judge Award

Timothy Hoxie, 1964 Maserati Mistral

Chuck Spielman Preservation Award

Coit Collection, 1989 Porsche Speedster

San Diego Automotive Museum Award

Rick Harbus, 1980 Renault 5 Turbo Series 1

Co-Chairman's Award

James Schultz, 1931 Chrysler Imperial Waterhouse Victoria

Best of Marque Award

Dieter-Heinz Kijora, 1955 Mercedes Benz 300 SL

Timeless Elegance Award - Presented by CJ Charles / OMEGA

Ricard da Rosa, 1936 Packard 1407

Automotive Legacy in Motion Award

Petersen Museum, 1967 Ford GT40 MKIII

2026 LA JOLLA CONCOURS D'ELEGANCE CLASS WINNERS

1a) Pre-War American - Open: 1925-1939

1st: Valerie & Aaron Weiss, 1933 Marmon V16 2 Dr Convertible Coupe

2nd: Scott Tepper, 1926 Rolls-Royce Silver Ghost (Springfield) Playboy Roadster Deluxe

3rd: James Schultz, 1931 Chrysler Imperial Waterhouse Victoria Disappearing Top Convert

1b) Pre-War American - Closed: 1925-1939

1st: The Nethercutt Collection, 1930 Packard 734 Speedster Victoria

2nd: Kyle Haldi, 1935 Packard 1203 Sedan

3rd: George Johnson, 1929 Packard 626 Sedan

2) Pre-War European: 1925-1939

1st: William Lyon, 1937 Mercedes Benz 540K Special Roadster

2nd: Donald Becker, 1938 BMW 327 Cabriolet

3rd: Terry Lunceford, 1931 Rolls Royce 20/25 Barker Sedan

3) Post-War American: 1947-1967

1st: Bruce Spangrud, 1953 Packard Caribbean Convertible

2nd: Archie Kuehn, 1960 Plymouth Fury 2 Door Hardtop

3rd: Howard Leight, 1955 Lincoln Capri 2 Door Convertible

4) Icons of Speed: 1935-2006

1st: Charles Wegner, 1959 Ferrari 250 LWB Competition TDF

2nd: Bill Ceno, 1990 Ferrari F40

3rd: Ernest & Elaine Nagamatsu, 1959 Buick Special "Old Yeller II" Roadster

5) European Suit with American Heart: 1950-1969

1st: Michael & Sally Kerns, 1967 Bizzarrini 5300 Strada

2nd: Randy & Sharon Simon, 1967 Iso Grifo Coupe

3rd: Jeff Phillips, 1967 Chrysler Ghia 450SS Convertible

6a) Post-War European - Open: 1946-1973

1st: Jonathan & Wendy Segal, 1955 Maserati A6GCS/53 Spyder

2nd: Phil White, 1955 Moretti 1200 Sport

3rd: Coit Collection, 1946 MG TC Convertible

6b) Post-War European - Closed: 1946-1973

1st: John Clark, 1965 Maserati Sebring SII

2nd: Jim Gianopoulos, 1964 Lamborghini 350 GT

3rd: Max Reyhani, 1974 Lancia Stratos

7) Production Built Turbocharged: 1962-1996

1st: Chandler Knapp, 1962 Oldsmobile F85 Jetfire

2nd: Gregory Oakley, 1962 Oldsmobile Jetfire Hardtop

3rd: Skip Motsenbocker, 1974 BMW 2002 Turbo

8) Jaguar: 1948-1974

1st: Jeremy & Laura Lee McChesney, 1955 Jaguar D Type Roadster

2nd: Tom Krefetz, 1950 Jaguar XK 120 Alloy Roadster (OTS)

3rd: Huw Holwill, 1962 Jaguar XKE Roadster (OTS)

9) Rising Sun - Japanese Class: 1965-1996

1st: Scott King, 1991 Honda Beat Roadster

2nd: Joseph Papp, 1970 Datsun 240Z

3rd: Gene Ondrusek, Ph.D., 1992 Acura NSX

10) Mercedes-Benz SL: 1954-1972

1st: Speed Legend Garage LLC, 1955 Mercedes Benz 300 SL Coupe

2nd: Marcel Stillekens, 1962 Mercedes Benz 300 SL Roadster

3rd: Eric Blumencranz, 1970 Mercedes Benz 280SL Roadster

11) VW Type 2 Bus: 1950-1967

1st: Ray Thom, 1966 VW Type 2 Bus

2nd: John Hass, 1958 Volkswagen Binz Double Cab

12) Porsche Air Cooled: 1955-1996

1st: Tom Frick, 1995 Porsche Carrera RS Clubsport

2nd: Coit Collection, 1989 Porsche Speedster

3rd: Frank Darmiento, 1956 Porsche 356 Super Sunroof Coupe

13) American Muscle: 1953-1982

1st: Harmon Anderson II, 1969 Chevrolet Camaro Z28

2nd: Joseph Cialeo, 1967 Camaro SS Pace Car Convertible

3rd: Dennis & Vicki Murfin, 1967 Shelby GT350 Fastback

14) Hyper Car

1st: Fastrrr Collection, 2014 Pagani Zonda Revolucion

2nd: Ancillary Studios Collection, 2018 Koenigsegg Agera RS "Ruthie"

3rd: Fastrrr Collection, 2008 Gumpert Apollo

15) Ferrari - Prancing Horse: 1948-1992

1st: Bill Ceno, 1995 Ferrari F50 Berlinetta and Spider

2nd: Kevork Hashas, 1983 Ferrari 512 BBi

3rd: B Lilly, 1970 Ferrari Dino 246 GT L

The Democratic Party Is Dead, Long Live the Jacobins!

By Victor Davis Hanson



For the past century, the agendas of the Democratic Party were predictable. They professed concern for working Americans and supported blue-collar unions.

Unemployment insurance, a 40-hour work week, disability insurance, and Social Security were their trademarks—often rapidly achieved by growing government bureaucracies and continually raising taxes. Still, many Democrats were socially conservative.

By the 1970s, Democrats still deplored antisemitism. Party officials had rejected their own segregationists to champion civil rights.

Presidents like Franklin Roosevelt, Harry Truman, and John F. Kennedy all supported strong defense and military deterrence.

All that is now passé.

The only vestigial Democrat left in Congress is Pennsylvania Senator John Fetterman, himself roundly despised by Democrat leaders.

Today, supporting Israel and calling for campuses to stop their institutionalized antisemitism is Democratic political suicide.

Forty years ago, any Democrat with a Nazi tattoo was political toast; today, he can become the party's nominee for the Maine Senate race.

So, the current Democrat Party is no longer truly democratic at all. Its new spirit and methods resemble the radical Jacobin Party of the French Revolution. Today, Democrats claim that if any opponent gives a Roman salute, he is a Nazi—while insisting that one of their own with a Nazi tattoo is not.

Jacobinism rejects Martin Luther King Jr.'s emphasis on the "content of . . . character." It instead prefers fixating on "the color of . . . skin."

It aims to divide the nation arbitrarily between the noble oppressed and the toxic oppressors.

So these new Jacobins have institutionalized racially separate college dorms and graduation ceremonies, along with hiring and promoting on the basis of race.

The new Jacobins destroyed the southern border and welcomed in 10–12 million illegal aliens, seen as a future proletariat constit-

“Like the Robespierre brothers of old, the most radical Jacobins are so often to be found among the wealthiest and most privileged Americans.”

- VICTOR DAVIS HANSON

uency. Today’s Jacobins would now ridicule Bill Clinton’s 1990s calls for secure borders and an end to illegal immigration as “fascist” and “racist.”

The most recent nihilist developments in American society can be attributed to these Jacobin “Democrats”: biological men competing in women’s sports; critical legal theory that normalizes cashless bail; race-based reparations; violent felons arrested and back on the street hours later; radical abortion on demand until birth; attacks on the concept of the cultural “melting pot”; and opposition to organized Christianity.

These agendas lack broad majority support. So street theater and violence focus on Tesla dealerships, ICE officers, conservative campus speakers, and, at times, any journalists covering the unrest.

Jacobins make excuses for pro-Hamas campus violence, which often targets Jewish students. The often violent and corrupt Black Lives Matter movement was a Jacobin ancillary.

Free speech is labeled “disinformation” and “misinformation”—synonyms for not toeing the Jacobin Party line. Until recent pushbacks, near-religious radical green agendas warred against fossil fuels and cost the working classes billions of dollars for sky-high fuel and electricity costs.

Like the Robespierre brothers of old, the most radical Jacobins are so often to be found among the wealthiest and most privileged Americans. Radical New York mayor Zohran Mamdani grew up as a rich Ugandan. Radical, self-described communist Maine senatorial candidate Graham Platner attended one of the most elite and expensive prep schools in the United States.

When avowed socialists Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Sen. Bernie Sanders barnstormed the country, they did so via private jets.

Radical “Squad” member Rep. Ilhan Omar cannot decide whether she is worth \$30 million or nothing. Hard-left California billionaire, gubernatorial candidate, and radical environmen-

talist Tom Steyer is a billionaire who jump-started his fortune by investing in coal plants overseas and offshoring profits to avoid taxes.

At least 10 states are drafting laws to tax the net worth, as well as the income, of “billionaires and millionaires,” apparently for their “social” crimes. Mayor Mamdani taps on the window of philanthropist Ken Griffin as a warning to get out of town. The mayor of Seattle scoffs at the rich leaving her state with their billions due to new punitive taxes, offering a sarcastic “bye.”

In the old days, Democrats were embarrassed by their radicals and distanced themselves from the Weather Underground, Students for a Democratic Society, and the Black Panthers. Today, left-wing bomb throwers are the Democrat Party.

Hasan Piker, another multimillionaire, \$200,000 Porsche-driving communist, has openly supported “social murder.”

So Piker praised Luigi Mangione’s targeted murder of United-Healthcare CEO Brian Thompson.

Meanwhile, Jacobins on social media expressed disappointment that all three assassination attempts on Donald Trump failed. The arsonist who burned down Pacific Palisades was a Mangione acolyte and saw his destruction as a revolutionary act, perhaps a form of mass “social murder.”

Jacobin politicians call for Trump to be “eliminated,” label him as a “fascist,” and call for “any means necessary” to end his presidency. The aim is to lower the social and psychological barrier to violence.

The Jacobin Democrats of today are systematically destroying the legacy of the Democratic Party. And why not?

Their model is not the American Founding, but the radical mandated equality—and violence—of the French Revolution.

PRSRT STD
US POSTAGE
PAID
PERMIT #3175
SAN DIEGO, CA



AND IT'S JUST THE BEGINNING OF YOUR ASCENT.

Congratulations
from Alaska Airlines
to San Diego's
40 Under 40.
Your ambition and
success are what
keeps taking you—
and San Diego—to
new heights.

Alaska
AIRLINES

